

CFLRP Project Effects on Mesa Fire

The Mesa Fire started July 27, 2018 on private land as a human-caused fire when a motorist on Idaho State Highway 95 had a tire blow out. The fire, immediately southeast of Council, quickly burned 14,825 acres of private and the Payette NF land in the first burning period. The following burning period on July 28 increased the acreage by 10,736 acres. The majority of the firefighting efforts in the first two burning periods focused on the private homes and structures immediately east of the community.



Mesa Fire on July 28 burning east of Council.

On July 29, with near record high temperatures in Council, and moderate to strong winds across the fire, Great Basin Type 2 Team 6 assumed command of the fire. With additional resources on hand, firefighting efforts began in earnest in the northeastern divisions of the fire on Payette NF lands in the Cottonwood Creek drainage.

Prior to the wildfire, the Forest, working under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program's (CFLRP) Mill Creek-Council Mountain Landscape Restoration Project, conducted commercial thinning, pre-commercial thinning and applied prescribed fire to the area. The most recent use of prescribed fire was to burn the west facing slopes of the North Fork of Cottonwood Creek, and in Cookhouse Gulch in the spring of 2018. Additionally, commercial thinning in the drainage had been done the year before. These fuel treatments within the Cottonwood Creek drainage provided notable benefits during the management of the Mesa Fire as wildfire entered several of the treated areas from July 28th through July 29th.

As the fire entered the Cottonwood drainage from private land at the height of the burning period, it was a high intensity, crowning wildfire.

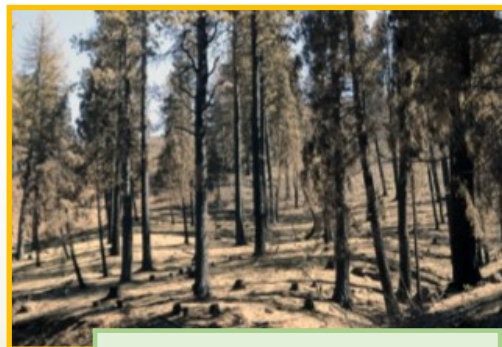
This high intensity fire burned through the initial forest lands that had been treated with fuel reduction projects, but as it burned through the area, the fire began to lose its steam.



High severity burn in lower Cottonwood Creek.

The importance of the strategic placement of these treatments cannot be overstated. Cottonwood Creek is a large, deep drainage that aligns with the prevailing southwest winds. Extreme fire behavior occurred July 27th, 28th and 29th. This included rapid upslope runs, crown fire, and long range spotting.

As the fire burned into the mid-slopes of the Cottonwood Creek drainage, the treatments further slowed the up-drainage spread of the fire, and reduced fire intensity in the form of less torching and no crown fire. This allowed ground resources and aircraft to safely and effectively complete a burnout operation that prevented further spread to the north and northwest towards the town of Council and outlying infrastructure.



Mid-slope treated area. Needles remained on trees after the wildfire passed through.

The burnout utilized a recently completed prescribed fire unit that had prior vegetation treatments. The placement of the treatment and the change in fuel composition were important in the success of this operation. The map on the opposite page shows the location of the fuels treatments with an overlay of the Mesa Fire perimeter.

Commercially thinning and prescribed fire on the

Commercially thinning and prescribed fire on the northwest side of Cookhouse Gulch. The prior fuels reduction work led to this ridgeline being secured and easily held as the fire moved through.



Low intensity wildfire burned in the commercially



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